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THE TROTH.

A PLAY IN ONE ACT.

Rutherford Mayne.

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THE TROTH
A Play in One Act
By Rutherford Mayne

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MAUNSEL & CO., LTD.
96 MIDDLE ABBEY ST., DUBLIN

1909

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CHARACTERS

EBENEZER MCKIE	<i>A farmer.</i>
MRS. MCKIE	<i>His Wife.</i>
FRANCIS MOORE	<i>A neighbour.</i>
JOHN SMITH	{ <i>A labourer in McKie's</i> <i>employ.</i>

The action takes place in the kitchen of Ebenezer McKie.

TIME *The middle of the nineteenth century*

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All communications re performances of this Play should be
addressed to Messrs. MAUNSEL & CO., Ltd.

THE TROTH

SCENE.—*The farm kitchen of EBENEZER MCKIE. There is a door at back and a window. To the left is a large, open fireplace, and to the right is a door leading to the bedroom. The kitchen is very scantily furnished and bare. There is a table at the back under the window, and a chair at each side. It is near midnight, and a candle placed on the mantel at the fireplace casts a dim light. An old muzzle-loading gun can be seen hung over the mantel. Outside the house is darkness, and a wind moans loudly as the curtain rises to discover MRS. MCKIE crouched over the fire. JOHN SMITH sits a little way off chafing his hands. MRS. MCKIE is a woman of some thirty-five years of age, neatly dressed, but poverty-stricken in appearance. JOHN SMITH is some five years her junior, and a stout, brawny type of labourer.*

MRS. MCKIE (*shivering*). Bless me but that's the cold night. The fire's near out, John. You're a bad hand at keeping up a fire.

SMITH. No wonder, and nothing to keep it going.

MRS. MCKIE. Get a lump more turf then.

SMITH. I was out just a wheen of minutes ago and there's no more turf about the place, ma'am. I could cut a lot of sticks if you like.

MRS. MCKIE. Na. We'll need them all for the morning. Deary me, there's not as much heat as would keep a tin of water at the boil. (*She shivers.*) Was it freezing hard?

SMITH. Aye, hard it is, ma'am. You'd hear your neb

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cracking if you put it round the corner of the door.
(*A wind wails mournfully around the house.*)

MRS. MCKIE. D'ye hear the wee bit of a cold wind singing? It's coming in off the old grey sea, and it would cut you to the bone. (*Wistfully.*) D'ye think the dead be cold, John?

SMITH (*startled*). What? Sure they've neither heat nor cold. It's all one to them. (*Looking at her curiously.*) You're talking strange, ma'am.

MRS. MCKIE. Aye. And whiles when I be thinking of my wee boy lying his lone in the old graveyard beyont, I be wishing I was near to hap him.

SMITH (*consolingly*). It was a sore loss to you, ma'am. But maybe he's better where he is.

MRS. MCKIE. He was a bonnie wee boy. My poor wee son.

SMITH. Cheer up, ma'am. There's no way like being right and hearty, and there's nothing to beat arguing to lift you out of yourself. If you like I'll argue politics with you.

MRS. MCKIE. No. I've no head for them things at all. But 'deed now, John, I hear you're a terrible old Tory.

SMITH. I am, indeed, and right proud I am of it too. And if I had it I'd send every pound I owned to turning all the people Tory.

MRS. MCKIE (*absently*). I wonder will Ebenezer's sister send us that money?

SMITH. Was it money the master went to fetch the night at Ballyhanlon, ma'am?

MRS. MCKIE. It was. (*Suspiciously.*) Who told you?

SMITH (*carelessly*). Nobody told me. I was expecting that's what he went for. Is the master's sister a well-doing woman, ma'am? I heard she was.

MRS. MCKIE. If Ebenezer had treated her a wee bit more decent at the time the old McKie, their father, was buried, he might have had more chance of getting

some from her the now. But I'm feared, John. (*Whispering.*) He kept fifty pounds off her that was hers by right.

SMITH. Aye?

MRS. MCKIE. Whist. Don't be telling anyone about it. He had intended to pay it, but what with the bad harvests this two years and one thing and another I'm feared it's all gone. Ah, John, but this is the terrible time of trouble. I suppose you heard they're starting the evicting to-morrow?

SMITH. Aye. D'ye know what I say is at the bottom of all this serving of writs and evicting on the estate, ma'am?

MRS. MCKIE. Ach, what could it be but the bad harvests this two years, and that hard old niggard of a landlord.

SMITH. Aye. Niggard or no niggard, he wouldn't have done a ha'pworth only for them Moores and Maguires and Maginnesses, and that connection, talking and threatening what they'd do on him if he wouldn't let them off the rent this winter. (*Emphatically.* Old Colonel Fotheringham's one of the right sort, and don't you be forgetting it, ma'am.

MRS. MCKIE (*contemptuously*). Ach. You're always backing up the quality. D'ye not know that every tenant on the estate, barring one or two, couldn't pay up, and they're every one of them noticed, there's no odds. And I heard the bailiffs were for Moore's first, poor creature, and be here the next. Och anee, John Smith, we'll be wandering the wide world the morrow. (*She breaks down and cries silently.*)

SMITH (*softening*). Cheer up, ma'am. D'ye think the master's sister would let the old place go and her rolling in money? Man a dear, it'll be lying ready for him the night in Ballyhanlon, don't you be a bit afeard. (*More or less to himself.*) It's the price of Moore and that lot raising all the bad talk against the landlord. Heth the evicting will soon settle them.

MRS. MCKIE (*hopelessly*). It'll settle more than them, John, I'm thinking.

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SMITH. Did you say the bailiffs were for Francey Moore's?

MRS. MCKIE. Deed are they, John. And him and his poor wee bit of a wife ailing. God preserve us! I heard they hadn't tasted anything but the Indian meal this six weeks, and her dying of the black fever.

SMITH. Aye. It's a pity of Moore in some ways too. But he shouldn't have talked the way he done.

MRS. MCKIE. A pretty wee girl she was, the same Mary Moore, with her black hair and her bonnie blue eyes. They say there's no chance of her coming round.

SMITH. Aye. I believe he's running about half out of his mind about her. (*He starts.*) I thought I heard somebody in the road outside. (*He goes toward the window and looks out.*) Aye. It's him you were talking about—Francey Moore. (*Knocking at the door.*)

MRS. MCKIE. Poor soul! Let him in, John. (*SMITH opens the door and MOORE enters. He is a nervous-looking man, with unkempt hair, black beard and wild dark eyes.*)

SMITH (*morosely*). How're you?

MOORE. Good evening. (*He seems benumbed with cold, and stands awkwardly near the door.*)

MRS. MCKIE. Come here, Francey, and warm yourself. You'll be starved with cold that night.

MOORE. It's terrible cold. (*He seats himself to the left of the table apparently unmindful of her invitation. SMITH stands near the door to the right eyeing him disapprovingly.*)

SMITH. How's it with you down there?

MOORE (*with an effort to keep back the agony that shows in his voice.*) Ah, my God. I couldn't stay in the house. The priest is in, and she's dying. It's only a matter of minutes now. (*After a pause.*) I thought I'd have caught McKie in.

MRS. MCKIE. He's down at Ballyhanlon the night to see about a bit of money to help to pay the rent. It's the hard and terrible times, Francey.

MOORE. I wouldn't mind it only for the wife, and it's killing her. Aye. *He* killed her.

SMITH. She might have a chance yet, man. I heard that.

MOORE. She—she's dying. I heard the death rattling in her throat, and I couldn't stand it, I couldn't bear it any longer. I came out of the house. I watched my two sons dying, gasping, fighting for air. I canna watch my wife.

SMITH (*listening*). There's the master's step. (McKIE *opens the door and enters. He is a middle aged man of some forty years and more, of powerful build, but gaunt with privation. He is weary and haggard-looking, and takes but little interest in the people in his kitchen. He throws his overcoat over a chair, and then goes and sits down to the left at the table almost opposite MOORE, and lets his head fall listlessly on his hands.*)

MRS. MCKIE (*watching her husband intently, and speaking with suppressed excitement*). Had you any luck? Was it no there?

MCKIE. There was nothing. Not a line nor a scrap. (*Bitterly.*) My God, she might have forgiven me. She might have remembered the old place to no let it go to the strangers—the old home of the McKies. I told her in the letter I sent about remembering when we were children together under the same thatch roof, but she must have hardened her heart agin me. Three times I wrote her and she never —

SMITH. I bid you good night, sir. (*He goes to the door.*) Is there anything you'd be wanting in the morning?

MCKIE (*listlessly*). Nothing. Barring you give us a hand to carry out them chairs and things. You're paid up to to-night, aren't you?

SMITH. Aye. You give it to me yesterday, all but ten shillings. But I can thole a bit. (*With a touch of malicious pride.*) I have got a job.

MCKIE. Aye?

SMITH. Yes. I'm hiring with the gardener up at the

demesne. Good night. (*He goes out and is heard whistling blithely.*)

McKIE (*raising his head, and then suddenly realising that MOORE is seated opposite him.*) Is that you, Francey? I didn't notice you before.

MOORE. It is.

McKIE (*turning to his wife*). Not a line nor a scrap did she send. I met Michael Malone, Annie, and he gave me a wee drop—just a wee drop to keep out the cold. (*He brings a small bottle of whiskey out of his pocket. Then, suddenly turning to MOORE.*) Who do you think I saw riding in with a policeman ahind him?

MOORE. The landlord.

McKIE. Aye. Colonel Fotheringham himself. I heard he was going to the agent's, so I walked out after him and went there, for I thought to myself that maybe if I could get speaking to him it might turn him. But they ordered me out like a dog when they heard I'd no money with me.

MRS. McKIE. He's here himself, then?

McKIE. Aye. He's coming back again to the hall the night.

MOORE (*eagerly*). Late? He'll be late coming? He'll no be by yet?

McKIE. No. He'll no be by yet. Maybe you think if you caught him you could soften him to you. (*Bitterly.*) Pah! Could you soften a stone?

MOORE (*intensely*). Maybe —

McKIE (*contemptuously*). Maybe! Do you know what I heard? The old widow Maguire of the whin head give him the black curse on her knees and him riding past. And he snappit his fingers at her and laughed.

MOORE (*half to himself*). Them that gets the black curse dies that same night.

McKIE (*looking in a wondering way at MOORE, and then seeing his wife regarding the latter with fear in her eyes.*) Here. Get to bed, woman dear. You'll be perished with cold.

MRS MCKIE (*rising obediently and going towards the bedroom door*). Deed aye. I'd be the better. Good night to you both and don't be long. I'm feared by myself in the dark.

MCKIE. We'll no be long. (MRS. MCKIE *goes out*.) Here. Take a drop, Francey. (*He pours some of the whiskey into a cup*.) It'll hearten you. Your wife—is she any the better?

MOORE (*broken-heartedly*). May God rest her soul this night.

MCKIE. She be dying?

MOORE (*hopelessly*). Aye.

MCKIE. I'm sorry for you, Francey. I lost a wee boy of my own. I'm sorry for you.

MOORE. God, but it's hard to loose house and home and wife and wains, and no ways for to beat it off. What are you for doing yourself? Can you pay up?

MCKIE. I canna.

MOORE. They're for my place the morrow, and they're for redding you out next.

MCKIE. Redding me out?

MOORE. Aye. And then when you're gone the people will be coming and pointing to the place, and the stranger they put in will be coming out, and they'll ask him who it belonged till, and no one to tell them it was once the McKies that owed it. (*With increasing intensity*.) Two year ago you mind there was a bad harvest. We prayed to the landlord to be easy. He told us no. Why? Why? Because, I tell you, Ebenezer McKie, and I know. He had debts of his own—gambling debts—debts of honour as the quality calls them. Next year it was worse. No one got in the crops. They lay rotten in the fields. You and me and the rest went to him again. We might as well have been praying to them big stones up yonder on Slieve Dubh. (*With a sob in his voice*.) Then the sickness come and the wee childre—they slippit away one by one. One that was to be called after you, McKie of Ballyhanlon, and two of my own wee

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childre—they went away by the dark boreens, and you couldn't call them back to you now. No—not if all the rents of the world was poured into your hand.

McKIE (*tremulously*). Don't, man. Don't.

MOORE (*his voice trembling with intense passion*). A pound or two might have saved them. Aye. Only a pound or two. And now they're lying rotten under the sod, but their wee souls is crying. You can hear them in the wind crying—crying to the God that made them for vengeance. (McKIE *raises his head and looks in a startled way at MOORE*.) Who owed the hand that took and wrenched the very food from their mouths? Who was it swore to the police sergeant—I'll learn them, says he, to obey me. I've a man for every place that knows how to labour the land, not a lot of lazy, drunken swine.

McKIE (*with anger*). He said that?

MOORE. I suppose, says he, for all their talking, they'll just go out with their tails between their legs like the lot of cowardly, snarling curs they are.

McKIE (*passionately*). He called us that, did he?

MOORE. Aye.

McKIE (*wildly*). And by God, Mr. Colonel Fotheringham, there was a McKie put the fear of the Lord in your boasting breed in '98, and there's another one will do it again the night. (*He starts up and reaches for the gun, then suddenly suspicious of MOORE, he stops and looks round at him.*)

MOORE (*smiling grimly*). You're afeared of me? Wait till you see what I put behind the barrel at the door. (*He opens the door, reaches his hand out and brings in a gun.*)

McKIE (*in an awed voice*). You mean to —

MOORE (*wildly*). Aye. I swore to do it this night, and I swore he would not escape. That's why I come to you. Listen. We can get him as he comes through the Glen. We can each take a side of the road. One side has a hedge with brambly land and the other across from it

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is most whins with the demesne wall behind. It's the only two places you can get him from. But I warn you. Him that takes the whinny side runs a chance of the rope. Fair do. We'll toss for it. If you win, you can have the pick.

McKIE. Afore I toss will you make me a promise. I want a promise off you, Francey Moore. We two have seen our wee children, as you say, slip by beyont us, and we have seen the brown earth shovelled over them the way you would bury a dog. They were buried the same day—my son and your own. Mine in the old meeting-house green and yours in the chapel graveyard, and you grippit my hand when I met you at the roads end, and you cried like a child. And I lay that same night at the same place we're going to to-night, but the hand of the Lord turned him back, and he came not by me. But I said to myself he should die. And the one thing I ask you to promise is this. If one's catched, he's no to tell tales on the other, and that other will look after his wife for him.

MOORE. I promise you.

McKIE. Swear it, man. Swear it.

MOORE. I swear it by the Lord God in Heaven.

McKIE (*taking a coin from his pocket and tossing it on the table*). Head or harp?

MOORE. Head. (*They both look at the coin.*) I've lost. I'll have to take to the whins.

McKIE. It will be a hard job to escape from your place.

MOORE. I'll chance it.

McKIE. But mind what you swore.

MOORE. You can trust me, and I can do the same with you. I want a cap off you for the gun. That's what I come for the night. (McKIE *goes across to the mantel, takes down a small box and extracts a few caps from it. He leaves it on the table and hands some to MOORE.*) He'll be here in a couple of minutes. Hurry.

McKIE (*taking down the gun and going across near the*

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door). I'll lock the door and take the key with me. If John Smith took a notion to come back, I'm feared he'd be for noticing the gun away. (*He follows MOORE out through the door and locks it. A pause.*)

MRS. MCKIE (*without*). Ebenezer! Ebenezer! (*She comes out into the kitchen.*) Ebenezer! He's away. I thought I might have given that poor creature Moore this half pound of tea I found in the drawer. (*She goes to the door and tries to open it.*) He's locked it! (*She shivers.*) It's cold. (*Uneasily.*) There's something queer about that Francey Moore. His eyes were flaming like that old cat of Mahaffy's looking at you in the darkness of the byre. He's next mad, that man, about his wife. She's not long for this world, I'm thinking. (*Knocking at the door.*) God have mercy. Who's that?

SMITH (*without*). It's me, John Smith. (*He goes round to the window.*)

MRS. MCKIE. Aye. You can look through the broke pane. What's the matter?

SMITH. I thought I would have got Moore here. His wife died a wee while ago. I'm after hearing it at home from the neighbours.

MRS. MCKIE. Well-a-well. She was a pretty wee girl in her time.

SMITH. I thought I'd have met the master and Moore coming down, but there was no sight of them.

MRS. MCKIE. The master — (*She catches sight of the box of caps, lifts them, and then with quick suspicion, her eyes travel over to where the gun used to hang.*) Ah! God bless us!

SMITH (*startled*). What ails you, ma'am?

MRS. MCKIE (*trembling violently, but recovering herself*). It was a nail catched me. You'd be the better of your bed, I'm thinking. (*A shot rings out in the distance. A short pause. Then another.*)

SMITH. D'ye hear yon? (*With a sudden suspicion in his voice.*) I say, ma'am.

MRS. MCKIE. Well?

SMITH. Did the master go out with Moore next the Glen?

MRS. MCKIE. The master? He's no out of the house. He was cold and I was getting him a wee drop to warm him. *(She reaches for the bottle on the table.)*

SMITH. Her head's turned ——. *(A sound of shouting in the distance.)* What's yon?

MRS. MCKIE. What?

SMITH *(listening intently.)* Shouting or something down the Glen! *(More shouting.)* Boys, and it's where the shots went off too! *(Renewed noise.)* D'ye no hear it? There's something wrong. I must away to see what it is. *(He rushes away quickly.)* MRS. MCKIE *listens until assured he is gone and, then, overcome, clutches at the table for support.)*

MRS. MCKIE. The landlord! He was to come up the Glen to-night. Oh, Lord God, preserve my husband, keep him from evil, save him from the shedding of blood. Save him, ah, God, my Saviour, save him! *(She kneels wildly at the table. A sound of soft footfalls outside makes her catch her breath and listen. MCKIE suddenly unlocks the door and appears. He goes lightly across the kitchen, hangs up the gun, and is just going through the bedroom door when his wife calls.)* Ebenezer! What have you been up to? What have you done? *(He remains silent.)* Where is Moore? What has he done? Ah, there was bad in the dark man. I seen it in his eye.

MCKIE. Sh. Get to your bed, woman.

MRS. MCKIE. I'm feared, Ebenezer, for John Smith was round, and he asked had you and Moore gone down by the Glen.

MCKIE. Ah, great God! And what did you say, woman? *(He rushes forward and grasps her almost fiercely by the hands.)*

MRS. MCKIE. I told him a lie. I said you were in your bed. Whist. *(A murmuring of voices can be heard.)* D'ye hear yon? *(The voices come nearer.)*

MCKIE. Canny with the light. *(He blows out the candle at the table.)*

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MRS. MCKIE (*going to the window and looking out cautiously.*) Lord have mercy! They're carrying something up the road. (*She turns to her husband.*) Ebenezer! In the mercy of God, speak! Did you do it? (*Hysterically.*) Ah, for God's sake, did you?

MCKIE. Whist. (*Sound of footsteps.*) Here's someone. Dinna let them in.

SMITH (*hurriedly coming to the window and speaking in a hushed awed voice.*) God bless us! I never thought he was that mad!

MRS. MCKIE. What is it?

SMITH. Francey Moore's in the hands of the police yonder. He shot the landlord, old Colonel Fotheringham, dead in the Glen, and they caught him among the whins. He'll swing for it now. I suppose it was the wife dying turned his head. They are bringing him and the body up by the house here to the barracks. (*He goes away back again.*)

MRS. MCKIE (*in a voice of terror.*) Ebenezer! Ebenezer! Was it you or him done it? (*The voices now come very near.*)

MCKIE (*standing where the darkness of the kitchen almost hides him.*) Hold your tongue, woman. Are they passed yet?

MRS. MCKIE (*looking out.*) No yet. (*She turns to him with a gesture of horror.*) It was you. I can see it in your eye. You killed him.

MCKIE (*breathlessly.*) Whist. Are they passed yet?

MRS. MCKIE (*as the sound of the voices dies away.*) They're gone. (*She goes forward, looks into his eyes, and then involuntarily shrinks back.*) It was you that killed him.

MCKIE. Peace, woman. (*He stretches out his hands towards her appealingly. She makes no movement.*) Moore has no wife.

(CURTAIN.)

THE TROTH

This Play was first produced at the Crown Theatre, Peckham. London, by Mr. William Mollison's Company, in October, 1908, with the following caste :—

<i>Ebenezer McKie</i>	W. A. MACKERAY
<i>Mrs. McKie</i>	JOSEPHINE WOODWARD
<i>Francis Moore</i>	WHITFORD KANE
<i>John Smith</i>	MURRAY GRAHAM

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